

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 001129

SIPDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY  
ALSO FOR DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE, U/S GROSSMAN, AND EUR  
A/S JONES  
FROM AMBASSADOR WEISER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/17/2024  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [LO](#)  
SUBJECT: AS I DEPART SLOVAKIA

Classified By: AMB RONALD WEISER FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (U) Mr. Secretary,

As I prepare to leave Slovakia, I want to thank you for the opportunity to serve as Ambassador and look ahead briefly to the future of U.S. relations with Slovakia.

WHERE WE ARE  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) When I arrived in Slovakia in November 2001, we faced the very real possibility of a return to power of the autocratic and corrupt former Prime Minister, Vladimir Meciar. However, by working with our European allies and the NGO community, we encouraged high voter turnout. This enabled remnants of the existing pro-democracy ruling coalition to form a new center-right coalition with Mikulas Dzurinda returning as Prime Minister. This was the first time that a reform government was able to win re-election in Central Europe. The GOS has been able to successfully adopt its package of western oriented reforms and Prime Minister Dzurinda should have no difficulty serving out his term.

[1](#)3. (C) Slovakia has been called an investor's paradise and it is now poised to become a regional economic power, especially in the automotive industry. Reforms have made Slovakia an economic success story and captured the attention of policymakers and businesspeople around the world. Cumulative foreign direct investment has doubled in the past three years and American companies are the third largest investors. U.S. Steel's Kosice operation is the largest economic force in Slovakia and the well-regarded company won your 2003 Award for Corporate Excellence. The recent announcement of a half billion dollar Ford investment, coupled with several other American companies already in or soon to come to Eastern Slovakia, means the U.S. has a disproportionately large and positive presence in this economically depressed region. Our very strong economic ties will help balance EU influence and provide a sturdy framework for our overall relationship for many years to come.

[1](#)4. (C) Slovakia's deployments to OIF, OEF, and Kosovo underscore its commitment to the war on terror. Slovakia has been the world leader per-capita in supplying troops to peacekeeping missions around the globe and is shifting away from UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) towards NATO-, EU-, and U.S.-led operations. This is an expensive decision, because UN PKOs are often reimbursable, but we support this shift because it more effectively supports U.S. interests. Parliament and the GOS are supportive of defense reforms sought by NATO that call for a smaller, more deployable military to meet NATO standards. Robust levels of FMF and IMET (in contrast to the reduced levels of the past two years) will be required to continue modernization and prevent the operational costs of the deployments we seek from providing an excuse for those who wish to derail the reform effort.

[1](#)5. (C) Slovakia's transition to a diverse, multicultural society is not complete. The GOS has made efforts to improve the lives of its Roma population living in poverty, but progress has been slow and a comprehensive solution will likely require the EU to take a major role (which it has been reluctant to do). Anti-Semitism and xenophobia still persist in certain elements of Slovak society, although repudiated by mainstream politicians. The GOS has a good record of addressing the law enforcement aspects of the trafficking issue; since neither it nor NGOs have been able to identify significant numbers of victims, programs of prevention and protection are not as developed as in neighboring countries. Corruption continues to be a problem throughout Slovakia and the broad immunity from conflict of interest and financial disclosure laws which MPs and judges enjoy exacerbates the problem. Nevertheless, economic growth and increased western investment have brought with them higher business standards and the level of corruption appears to have diminished over the last several years.

## THE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

16. (C) Since 1998, the twin goals of NATO and EU membership have been the focal points of the Slovak government and people. They enjoyed broad support across the political spectrum and were the locomotive of reform. The political leadership of the country has not come to terms with what it wants to accomplish as a member of these institutions over the long haul. Combined with a national character that tends to view Slovakia and Slovaks as underdogs, this has meant

that Slovakia is hesitant to take a forceful role in most NATO and EU discussions. Slovak views are reflexively transatlantic and the U.S. is still viewed as the beacon of hope that never dimmed during the Communist era. We are thus in a unique position to encourage some national introspection and guide the Slovaks to full-fledged membership of NATO and the EU, in support of U.S. interests.

17. (C) The 2006 elections present a new challenge for the GOS, and the U.S. Robert Fico appears to have succeeded in consolidating the left parties, and his SMER party consistently leads the polls. He continues to defy attempts to categorize him politically, and eschews concrete policy positions in favor of "by-the-poll-numbers" populism. The GOS has the opportunity to counter this if the reforms produce noticeable improvements in quality of life over the next two years.

18. (C) It is clear that the Embassy must actively engage the Slovak public to help them understand what the U.S. -- and U.S. policy -- are really all about. A major factor in Slovak perceptions of the United States will be the degree to which Slovaks believe we are being responsive to their concerns regarding U.S. visa policy. Within the constraints of current policy the Embassy must step up its efforts to encourage Slovak travel to the U.S. and to counter the urban legends surrounding the "visa issue". This can reduce the problem but only a change in policy will fix it.

19. (C) This Embassy has received sorely-needed positions due to your Diplomatic Readiness Initiative. This must be teamed up with increased funding for security assistance, for public outreach, for exchanges, and for small grants if we are to preserve our position and advance our agenda.

## THE FOREIGN SERVICE

10. (U) I would like to highlight the excellent work conducted by post's talented group of Foreign Service officers, specialists and nationals. When I arrived here I expected to find bureaucrats who were entrenched in an unwieldy system of government inefficiency. Instead, I found a group of talented and motivated individuals who were dedicated to their work of carrying out the President's foreign policy objectives. It has been a privilege and an honor to work with these people, who have allowed us to accomplish much during my three very rewarding years as Ambassador to the Slovak Republic.

WEISER

NNNN